**Recommendation – Submitted to the Early Learning Council Executive Committee by the Quality & Workforce Committee, April 2023**

The Quality & Workforce Committee recommends Executive Committee action as follows:

* Approve the “ExceleRate Illinois Revised Framework” (dated 3/22/23) as a roadmap for policy development by GOECD and State agencies. This action does not include approval of every standard as written.
* Add comments or questions for consideration by other committees and State agencies.

**Background**

In 2018, the ELC Quality Committee established the ExceleRate Subcommittee to review why so few programs were moving up the quality ladder. For example, only 30% of licensed child care centers have ever moved above the Licensed-only Circle of Quality. The Subcommittee worked for more than 3 years to envision what a high functioning school-based or center-based program would look like, and based on that vision, to revise the existing ExceleRate framework. Subcommittee members were drawn from child care and school-based programs, technical assistance providers, State agencies, Illinois Head Start Association, professional groups, advocacy groups, and more.

During 2022, GOECD conducted stakeholder reviews and edited details of the framework based on feedback. Stakeholder reviews included ISBE, IDHS, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Dept. of Family & Support Services, Latino Policy Forum, Interagency Team, Illinois BUILD team consultants, and others.

From November 2020 through December 2022, the ExceleRate Child Care Center Pilot tested the new Culture of Improvement domain in 34 rural child care centers, supported by foundational compensation contracts issued by IDHS. Results were outstanding, and IDHS is building on the lessons learned in its current design process for Smart Start compensation contracts.

**The Framework**

Framework elements include:

*Support Cultures of Improvement.* The Subcommittee found that the first driver of quality is organizational culture. In some programs, the entire staff works continuously to meet new challenges and improve. In those programs, the leader (director, principal, coordinator, etc.) takes ownership of quality and facilitates continuous improvement practices. The proposed framework outlines steps for leaders to implement those practices at each Circle of Quality.

*Align standards, funding and supports*. Programs need all three. The Bronze and Silver Circles of Quality focus on leadership for an equity-centered culture of improvement. The standards can be supported by Smart Start foundational contracts being developed at IDHS, and program leader coaching from technical assistance providers. The Gold Circle continues to focus on school readiness and generally aligns with Preschool for All funding, standards and supports. A new Gold Plus Circle adds comprehensive services for families, aligned with the Preschool for All Expansion Model, Prevention Initiative, Head Start, and Early Head Start. Not every program will need public funding, but the framework recognizes that all programs need adequate funds to meet quality standards.

*Standards updates to reflect emerging knowledge in the field and feedback from communities*. Standards and guidance are strengthened for Dual Language Learners, culturally responsive teaching strategies, and children with disabilities and developmental delays. These updates appear in the Teaching & Learning section and the Family & Community Engagement section.

**Using the framework**

The Quality & Workforce Committee is asking the Executive Committee to approve the framework as the general direction for ExceleRate changes to be implemented by IDHS and ISBE working together. The Committee recognizes that full implementation will require budget increases and policy changes over time. Needed changes will include funding and growth of the Smart Start initiative and full implementation of aligned coaching (through IDHS and ISBE support service contracts).

**Additional comments for consideration by State agencies going forward.**

Executive Committee comments will be recorded by GOECD and shared with IDHS and ISBE.

The full proposed framework is attached.